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ABSTRACT

This digest addresses some of the special career planning needs of gifted and talented students and offers intervention guidelines for the elementary, junior high, senior high, college, and adult levels. Indications that students are having difficulty coping with the multipotentiality of their talents may be evidenced by early difficulty in making choices and decisions and difficulty in choosing an academic major in college. Possible intervention strategies for multipotentiality at different educational levels are offered. Alternatively, children may be early emergers who have extremely focused career interests and require balanced encouragement of their special interests. Indicators of early emergence characteristics as well as possible intervention strategies at each age level are offered. Both multipotentiality and early emergence characteristics require skillful career education and guidance. In addition, special populations such as minority gifted students and gifted girls and women have unique career guidance needs. Includes 12 references. (DB)

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CAREER PLANNING FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED YOUTH

Although parents and teachers may be concerned about academic planning for gifted and talented young people, they often assume that career planning will take care of itself. Students may have many choices available because of multiple gifts or a particular talent, and a career choice in that area seems inevitable. There is no need for career planning: The student is simply expected to make an occupational decision around the sophomore year of college and then follow through on the steps necessary to attain that goal.

Unfortunately, evidence is mounting that youthful brilliance in one or more areas does not always translate into adult satisfaction and accomplishment in working life. Studies with such diverse groups as National Merit Scholars (Watley, 1969), Presidential Scholars (Kaufmann, 1981), and graduates of gifted education programs (Kerr, 1985) have shown that the path from education to career is not always smooth, and it may be complicated by social-emotional problems and needs of gifted students that differ from those of more typical students.

Recognition of these problems has produced counseling models that address student needs (e.g., Berger, 1989; Buescher, 1987; Silverman, 1989; VanTassel-Baska, 1990). Some factors that can contribute to problems with career planning are presented here, along with ways of preventing and intervening with career development problems.

Multipotentiality

Multipotentiality is the ability to select and develop any number of career options because of a wide variety of interests, aptitudes, and abilities (Frederickson & Rothney, 1972). The broad range of opportunities available tends to increase the complexity of decision making and goal setting, and it may actually delay career selection. Multipotentiality is most commonly a concern of students with moderately high IQs (120–140), those who are academically talented, and those who have two or more outstanding but very different abilities such as violin virtuosity and mathematics precocity. Signs that multipotentiality is a concern include the following:

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Elementary school: Despite excellent performance in many or all school subjects, students may have difficulty making decisions, particularly when they are asked to make a choice on topics or projects from among many options. Multiple hobbies with only brief periods of enthusiasm and difficulty in finishing up and following through on tasks (even those which are enjoyable) are additional signs for concern.

Junior high: Despite continued excellence in many or all school subjects, difficulty with decision making and follow-through continue. Students may participate in multiple social and recreational activities with no clear preferences, and they may overschedule, leaving few free periods and little time to just think.

Senior high: Decision-making problems generalize to academic and career decisions, resulting in overly packed class schedules and highly diverse participation in school activities. Students often accept leadership of a wide variety of groups in school, religious activities, and community organizations. Adults may notice occasional signs of stress and exhaustion (absences, frequent or chronic illness, periods of depression or anxiety, etc.), or they may see evidence of delay or vacillation about college planning and decision making. Students are able to maintain high grades in most or all courses taken. An important clue to continuing multipotentiality is the student's vocational interest test profiles. These tests often show interests and similarities to an unusually large number of occupations.

College: Multipotential students often have multiple academic majors. Three or more changes of college major are not unusual for an individual who cannot set long-term goals. They continue intense participation in extracurricular activities and have outstanding academic performance but are concerned about selecting a career. They may make hasty, arbitrary, or "going-along-with-the-crowd" career choices. They may encounter the dilemma of opportunities lost in giving up some interests in favor of others.

Adulthood: Some of the implications of multipotentiality can be seen in bright adults who, despite excellent performance in most jobs, hold multiple positions in short time periods and experience a general feeling of

lack of fit in most jobs. Some experience feelings of alienation, purposelessness, depression, and apathy despite high performance and excellent evaluations. Some experience periods of unemployment and underemployment, or they fall behind same-age peers in career progress and sometimes social development (marriage, family, community involvement).

Possible intervention strategies for multipotentiality at different educational levels include the following:

Elementary School

- Provide realistic exposure to the world of work through parent sharing and exposure to parents' working places.
- Encourage career fantasies through dress-up and plays.
- Encourage focusing activities such as class projects or achievement of Scout merit badges, which require goal setting and follow-through.
- Use biographies of eminent people as primary career education material.
- As teachers or parents, carefully evaluate skills, talents, and interests in order to help children understand possible areas of greatest interest.

Junior High

- Discuss the meaning and value of work.
- Discuss family and community values pertaining to work.
- Provide for light volunteer work in several areas of interest.
- Provide "shadowing" experiences in which students spend the day with an adult working in an area of greatest interest.
- Discourage overinvolvement in social and recreational activities for the sake of involvement; prioritize and decide on a few extracurricular involvements.

Senior High

- Seek appropriate vocational testing from a guidance professional or psychologist.
- Encourage visits to college and university classes in a few areas of interest.
- Provide for more extensive volunteer work.
- Explore possibilities of paid internships with professionals.
- Insist on a solid curriculum of coursework in order to insure against inadequate preparation for a later career choice.
- Provide value-based guidance, which emphasizes choosing a career that fulfills deeply held values.
- Discourage conformist, stereotyped career choices.
- Expose students to atypical career models.

College Students and Young Adults

- Seek career counseling including assessment of interests, needs, and values.
- Enroll in a career planning class.
- Encourage careful course selection.
- Avoid conformist and stereotyped major choices.
- Seek a mentor.
- Engage in long-term goal setting and planning.

Early Emergence

Early emergers (Marshall, 1981) are children who have extremely focused career interests. A passion for an idea and an early commitment to a career area are common childhood characteristics of eminent individuals in a wide variety of professions (Bloom, 1985; Kerr, 1985); thus, early emergence should not be thought of as a problem of career development, but rather as an opportunity that may be acted upon, neglected, or, unfortunately, sometimes destroyed. Acting upon early emergence means noticing an unusually strong talent or enthusiasm, providing training in skills necessary to exercise that talent, providing resources, and keeping an open mind about the future of the talent or interest. Neglecting early emergence means overlooking the talent or interest or failing to provide education and resources. Destroying the early emerger's passion may not be easy, but belittling the talent or interest ("Who cares about someone who doodles and draws all the time instead of listening?" "What makes you think you can become an anthropologist?") may easily extinguish the flame. Insisting on well-roundedness or disallowing needed training (e.g., refusing to allow a mathematically precocious child to accelerate in math) may diminish the passion. Overly enthusiastic encouragement and pressure may also remove the intrinsic pleasure the child feels in the interest or talent area.

As with multipotentiality, there are signs of early emergence:

Elementary school: Avid interest in one school subject or activity with only general liking for other subjects and activities and extraordinary talent in one area and average or above average performance in others are underlying signs of early emergence. (These students may be mistakenly labeled as underachievers). Students may also try to write more papers than required, choose too many subjects in the area of interest, and mention early career fantasies about success and fame in a particular area of interest.

Junior high: Students continue highly focused interests and may express a strong desire for advanced training in an area of talent and interest. Development of adolescent social interests may be delayed because of a commitment to work in a talent area or because of rejection by others, yet performance in the talent area grows, while performance in other areas diminishes.

Senior high: Students may develop a strong identity in the talent area ("computer whiz," "artist," or "fix-it person," for example). They may express a desire for help with planning a career in an area of interest. A desire to test skill in competition with or in concert with peers in the chosen talent area and continued high performance in the talent area to a degree that causes neglect of other school subjects or social activities are additional signs of a focused interest and passion.

College students and young adults: These young people make an early, but not hasty or arbitrary, choice of career or major. They often show a desire for completion of a training period in order to "get on with work," seek out mentors, continue intense focus, and often neglect social and extracurricular activities.

Adulthood: Adults may continue their intense focus, desire eminence or excellence in the talent area, and possibly forego or delay other aspects of adult development such as marriage, nurturing of a younger generation, social and community involvement, and personal development.

Possible intervention strategies for early emergers at different educational levels include the following:

Elementary School

- Provide for early identification of unusual talent or area of precocity.
- Consult with experts on the nature and nurture of particular gifts or talents.
- Consult with the school on ways of nurturing the talent or gift.
- Encourage fantasies through reading of bibliographies and playing of work roles.
- Provide opportunities to learn about eminent people in the talent area (attend a concert; visit an inventor's workshop; attend a math professor's class).
- Relate necessary basic skills to the area of interest.
- Provide opportunities to socialize with children with similar, intense interests through such activities as music camps, computer camps, and Junior Great Books.
- Strike a careful balance between encouragement and laissez-faire; provide support for the interest along with freedom to change direction. Do not become so invested in the child's talent or interest that you fail to notice that the child has changed interests. (Early emergers most often change to a closely related interest; that is, they switch musical instruments or transfer an interest in mathematics to an interest in theoretical physics).

Junior High

- Provide support and encouragement during the intensive training that often begins at this point.
- Allow for plenty of time alone.
- Seek opportunities for job "shadowing" (following a professional throughout the working day) in area of interest.
- Seek opportunities for light volunteer work in area of interest.
- Avoid pressuring the student into social activities.

Senior High

- Continue support, encouragement, and time alone.
- Seek opportunities for internships and work experiences in the areas of interest (internship on archaeological dig; job as camp counselor at a fine arts camp; coaching younger people in musical or athletic skill).
- Seek career guidance from a guidance counselor *who is familiar with the talent area* or from a professional in that field.
- Make a detailed plan of training and education leading toward the chosen career goal, including financial arrangements.
- Explore higher education or postsecondary training early and thoroughly, with contacts and visits.
- Help the student establish a relationship with a mentor in the area of interest. Early emergers often fare better in a less prestigious institution where they have access to an enthusiastic mentor than in an Ivy League or high status institution where they do not.

College Students and Young Adults

- Help provide support for extended education and training.
- Encourage the development of knowledge of career ladders in the area of interest (auditions, gallery shows, inventor's conventions, etc.).
- Encourage a continuing relationship with a career-counseling or guidance professional for support in decision making and problem solving.

The career development problems discussed here are nearly opposite one another: The multipotential student seems unfocused, delaying, and indecisive, whereas the early emerger is focused, driven, and almost too decisive. Both types carry with them dangers and opportunities. Skillful career education and guidance can help ensure that neither multipotentiality nor early emergence leads to difficulty in career planning and development.

Career Planning for Special Populations

Minority Gifted Students

Minority gifted students have special career planning needs as well as needs related to multipotentiality or early emergence. Minority students from Black, Hispanic, and American Indian backgrounds are less likely to have been selected for gifted education programs and less likely to perform well on standardized achievement tests than their nonminority peers. In addition, they may have lower career aspirations because of lower societal expectations. Nevertheless, the patterns of leadership and out-of-class accomplishments of gifted minority students are very similar to those of nonminority gifted students (Kerr, Colangelo, Maxey, & Christensen, 1989). Minority gifted students are active leaders in other communities. Therefore, career counseling for these students may be most effective when it focuses on raising career aspirations and emphasizes out-of-class accomplishments as indicators of possible career directions. Career planning must also go hand in hand with building a strong ethnic identity if later conflict between ethnic identity and achievement in majority society is to be avoided. Colangelo and LaFrenz (1981) have provided suggestions for how this can be accomplished.

Gifted Girls and Women

Persisting sex role stereotypes and the continued socialization of girls for secondary roles means that, despite great gains in certain fields such as medicine and law, gifted girls are less likely than gifted boys to achieve their full potential. Although gifted girls outperform gifted boys in terms of grades, gifted boys achieve higher scores on college admissions examinations. Compared to gifted boys, gifted girls are underprepared academically, having taken fewer mathematics and science courses and less challenging courses in social studies. As a result, they have fewer options for college majors and career goals (Kerr, 1985). Bright women apparently let go of career aspirations gradually, first through underpreparation and later through decisions that may put the needs of husbands and families before their own. Gifted women fall behind gifted men in salary, status, and promotions throughout their working lives.

In order to ensure that gifted girls have the greatest possible chance to fulfill their potential, career planning should emphasize rigorous academic preparation, particularly in mathematics and science; maintaining high career aspirations; and identifying both internal and external barriers to the achievement of career goals. Many suggestions for career planning for gifted girls are provided in *Smart Girls, Gifted Women* (Kerr, 1985).

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